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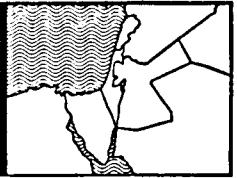
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# **CROSSROADS**

Monthly Bulletin of the Youth Committee for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East



VOL. II No. 6

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JUNE, 1971

# **BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE**

**The Issues in the Middle East Conflict**

**by Carl Gershman**

*We dedicate this pamphlet to  
Max Weinrib  
who worked tirelessly to build a just world,  
and who helped the Youth Committee come to life  
at the very moment his own life was ending.*

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In debates about the Middle East conflict, there is a tendency to delve as far back into history as possible, as if the discovery of some original point of sin or, as the case may be, of blessedness can provide answers to the problems of today. Questions of ancient rights and wrongs are without doubt important, especially when dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict which is rooted in historical claims and counter-claims. But the most useful point of departure is a relatively recent event and the political context in which it occurred. This event was the creation of Israel, a consequence in good part of a massive human response to the terrifying reality of the Holocaust. Of course not everybody supported the establishment of the State of Israel. The Arabs didn't, nor the British, nor the oil interests in the United States. But humanitarian opinion throughout the world supported it, and so did the two greatest world powers, the Soviet Union and the United States.

The fact that the creation of Israel occurred the way it did should clearly indicate that it was not the product of some imperialist plot as is often claimed by slogan-mongers and by pseudo-universalists who have a warm spot in their heart for every form of nationalism but the Jewish variety. Backroom deals with imperialists might move hundreds or perhaps thousands of people, but the creation of Israel was approved by millions upon millions because it was seen as a justifiable and necessary means to secure the survival of the Jewish people.

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*Carl Gershman is Co-Chairman of the Youth Committee for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East. This article is adapted from a presentation delivered as part of a debate on the Middle East crisis.*

The charge is sometimes made that Israel was created by the West, against the wishes of the Arabs, as expiation for the Western sin of anti-Semitism. There are a number of errors here. Israel was not created by the West but by Zionists who were opposed by the most powerful of the Western powers, Great Britain. Moreover, anti-Semitism is far more an Eastern than a Western sin. In general, Jews have achieved a high degree of security in the Western democracies while it has been in the East—the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Arab world—where they have been most harshly persecuted. Arab anti-Semitism, far from being caused by modern Zionism, as is sometimes charged, pre-dates it by more than a thousand years. Indeed, the persecution of Jews in Persia, Morocco and Algeria in the 19th Century was one of the factors that convinced early Zionist thinkers of the need for a Jewish homeland. And when such a homeland was established, practically all the Jews from Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries chose to flee to Israel, rather than remain where they did not feel safe or wanted.

### History

The history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine is often distorted by Israel's enemies who want to justify their call for politicide. The land which the Jews acquired in Palestine before 1947 was purchased from absentee land-owners. It was not stolen. And according to a spokesman for the Palestine Arab Higher Command in 1936, "nowhere in the world were such uneconomic prices paid (for land) as by the Jews in Palestine." The migration of Jews to Palestine did not displace Arabs but actually attracted them to the area in larger numbers than even the Jews themselves. The land was desolate before the Jews

came. From the French historian Volney who wrote in 1785 to the American visitor Mark Twain who wrote a century later, we hear the same refrain from all accounts — desolation, depopulation, "a ruined land," as Colonel Candor called it in 1883. In 1922 the Arab population in Palestine, excluding Trans-Jordan which the British created that year, numbered 557,000, but it was only 186,000 in that one-fifth of Palestine that was later to become the State of Israel. The Jewish population at the time was 84,000. During the next 25 years, the Jewish population increased by 500,000 while the Arab population rose by 700,000. The Arabs were attracted by the Jewish-inspired development of industry and agriculture, by employment opportunities, and by the prospect of higher wages which averaged 2 to 9 times higher than the prevailing wage rates in the neighboring countries of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. What is often overlooked is that the Arab population growth from 1922 to 1947 was largest in areas of Jewish settlement (Haifa 216%, Jaffa 134%, and Jerusalem 97%) and smallest in predominantly Arab areas (Nablus 42%, Jenin 40%, and Bethlehem 32%).

Another point is that is often overlooked is that no Arabs were displaced until the War of Independence in 1948. A study by a Commission appointed by the British in 1937, for example, reported that there had been only 664 valid claims by landless Arab fellahin, and all of the Arabs had either accepted resettlement or had found satisfactory employment elsewhere. It is true that many Arabs later became refugees but as the Secretary of the Palestine Higher Command admitted several months after the outbreak of the War of Independence, this was "the direct consequence

of the act of the Arab states in opposing partition and the Jewish State." (Beirut Telegraph, September 6, 1948)

### Refugees

Why the Arabs left Israel is a question that is still heatedly debated, as if finding an answer would somehow solve the problems of the refugees. Was the flight of the Arabs part of a deliberate military strategy? or was it simply the result of panic on the part of the Arab civilians? There is truth in both explanations. The Arab military wanted the Arab civilians evacuated to clear the way for their armies and for expected bombing raids. In addition, the frightening stories the Arabs spread about the Jews and the very fact of the war itself produced panic. Another reason the Arabs fled so readily is that they were convinced that they would be returning shortly. When Azzam Pasha, the Secretary General of the Arab League, said on the eve of the war, "This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades," they believed him. They thought they would return after a swift Arab victory cleared the area of Jews. And they were not so gullible because few people gave the tattered Jewish army much of a chance. As one of the refugees said some years later, "The Arab governments told us, 'Get out so that we can get in.' So we got out, but they did not get in." (*Al-Difa'a*, September 6, 1954)

One can endlessly debate the specific conditions that obtained in 1948 with regard to the refugees, but one over-riding fact should remain clear to everybody: the refugee problem was a consequence of the war, and those who started the war cannot escape responsibility for its consequences.



**Refugees: pawns of Arab politics.**

Two final points should be emphasized about the refugee question. The first is that 1948 also produced Jewish refugees from Arab countries, about 500,000 of them. Thus, a population exchange took place on the order of about one to one. The other point is that the refugee problem persists today not because of anything Israel does or doesn't do, but because the Arabs do not want it to be solved for political reasons. In 1957, Dr. Elfan Rees, the Adviser on Refugees of the World Council of Churches, made the following analysis:

I hold the view that, political issues aside, the Arab refugee problem is by far the easiest post-war refugee problem to solve by integration. By faith, by lan-

guage, by race and by social organization, they are indistinguishable from their fellows of their host countries. There is room for them, in Syria and Iraq. There is a developing demand for the kind of manpower they represent. More unusually still, there is the money to make this integration possible. The United Nations General Assembly, five years ago, voted a sum of 200 million dollars to provide, and here I quote the phrase, "homes and jobs" for the Arab refugees. That money remains unspent, not because these tragic people are strangers in a strange land, because they are not, not because there is no room for them to be

established, because there is, but simply for political reasons . . .

These reasons were spelled out in a resolution adopted at a Conference on Refugees held in Syria in 1957: "Any discussion aimed at a solution of the Palestine problem which will not be based on ensuring the refugees' right to annihilate Israel will be regarded as a desecration of the Arab people and an act of treason." Or as Nasser said more succinctly, "If the Arabs return to Israel, Israel will cease to exist."

One might also ask in passing whether the fact that there is not today an autonomus Palestinian state is due to anything Israel did, or whether this is the result of the annexation by Jordan and Egypt of territory that the U.N. partition resolution of 1947 had set aside for such a state. We should recall that Jordan was almost expelled from the Arab League for her action.

#### **"Imperialism"**

The charges levelled against Israel by some "leftists" today have to do with far more than the refugee problem. Israel, they would have us believe, is imperialist by its very nature and is also the tool of Western imperialism which is suppressing the Arab revolution. The Zionist movement, we are told, was always imperialist. Thus the Zionists were supposedly linked to the imperialists in 1922 when the British, in disregard of the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations Mandate, excised 75% of Palestine to create the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan. The British authorities that year also curtailed Jewish immigration, another pro-Zionist imperialist act. The Chamberlain White Paper of 1939, which prohibited the sale of land to Jews, restricted Jewish immigration to a minimum (at a time when the Jews were trying to flee Nazi

Europe) and decreed that an Arab state should be created in the whole of Palestine was also, no doubt, a clear indication of the intimate connection between Zionism and British imperialism. Jewish armed resistance against the British was also imperialist, as was the War of Independence against British vassals like King Farouk, Nuri el Said, and King Abdullah, against the Jordanian Legion, a British-led army, and against the Arab armies whose attack was coordinated by Major I. C. Clayton, the British Foreign Office Liaison man with the Arab League. When Israel's resentment against the British caused her to withdraw from the Commonwealth and abolish English as the third official language, additional indications were given of Israel's friendly relations with imperialism.

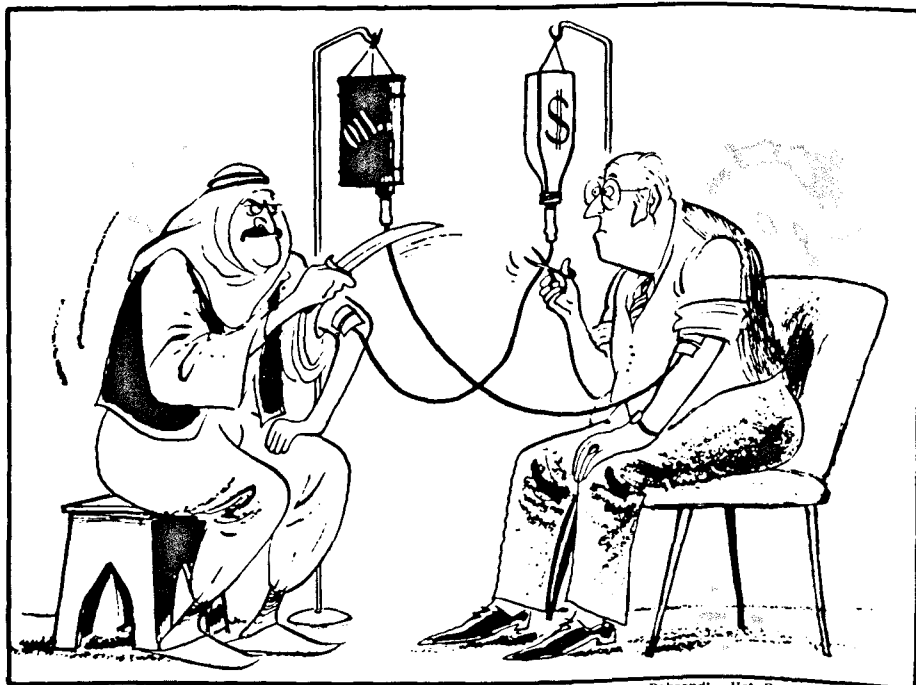
Israel, we are told, is still linked to imperialism — United States imperialism. Now imperialism exists in the Middle East. That cannot be denied. But only a simple-minded person or a demagogue can content himself with just throwing the word around as if that by itself clarified the problem. Let us assume that America has an imperialist interest in Israel. What could that interest be? Could it be, perhaps, that the United States wants to take over the olive trees in Israel? Or perhaps, given our strained relations with Chile where there is heavy investment in copper, the United States now wants to take over Solomon's copper mines. Is it too far-fetched to speculate that the United States wants to take over Israeli camels because there is a shortage of camels in American Zoos? Could this be what dictates the imperialist appetite of the United States?

Now we all know that there is an enormous amount of oil in the Middle

East. It is near Israel. It is owned by the Arabs and leased in large part by American oil companies. America needs oil, for itself and for its allies, Western Europe and Japan. It is busy chasing all over the world after oil, digging for it in Alaska and elsewhere. Without oil the United States would not die, but it would begin to choke to death. If America acted on its imperialist interest in the Middle East, its policy would be pro-Arab. Israel doesn't have enough oil to light a lamp. Arab oil can light and move the world. I find it astounding that anyone can entertain the notion that the United States hopes to control the vast reaches of Mideast oil reserves from an office in Tel-Aviv.

## U.S. Policy

The United States policy in the Middle East has always been equivocal because it has been the product of conflicting interests and pressures. U.S. policy was certainly not firmly pro-Israel in the years following World War II when the oil lobby and its allies in the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff tried every trick in the book to prevent the creation of Israel. Jorge Garcia-Granados, the Guatemalan diplomat and member of the U.N. Special Committee on Palestine, wrote in *THE BIRTH OF ISRAEL* that "Partition was not voted under pressure of the United States. It was voted because of the



Behrendt—Het Parool, Amsterdam

**Imperialism: a matter of oil, not camels.**



tireless efforts of those in the United Nations and in the world who believed in its justice and historic necessity." Required reading for all "left" enemies of Israel should be the diaries of James Forrestal, the Secretary of Defense under Truman, who described how considerations of oil made him an opponent of the creation of Israel.

The United States was also not being pro-Israel in 1957 when it pressured Israel to withdraw from the Sinai on the basis of a guarantee that freedom of passage through the Straits of Tiran would be preserved and a United Nations force would administer Gaza until a final peace settlement was arrived at. Dulles was not being pro-Israel when immediately after that understanding was reached with Israel he told representatives of nine Arab states that the

Israeli withdrawal involved "no promises or concessions whatsoever to Israel by the United States." And the United States was not being firmly pro-Israel in 1967 when it did not come to Israel's aid following Nasser's violations of the agreement that had been reached 10 years before.

It is an absurd and frightening state of affairs when people use the criterion of hostility to Israel to determine whether someone is anti-imperialist and "revolutionary." Do Kuwait and Saudi Arabia embody the Arab revolution simply because they finance attacks against Israel? Was Nasser anti-imperialist when he nationalized the property of the Christian Copt minority? and was he revolutionary in not challenging the economic power of a tiny minority of some 10,000 people who still own most of the land in Egypt while half the population consists of landless fellahin? Is that Israel's fault? Did Nasser carry on an *anti*-imperialist struggle in the Yemen? Have Syria and Iraq behaved in a revolutionary way toward their Kurdish minorities? Is the horrible oppression and slaughter of black Southern Sudanese by the Northern Moslem government also revolutionary? And is the fedayeen movement, which would not exist without financial support from the Arab states and which endorses a policy of neutrality with regard to the mutual and internal affairs of the Arab states, thus supporting the *status quo*: is this movement also revolutionary because the fedayeen advocate the annihilation of Israel?

### Soviet Imperialism

If there is an Arab revolution, it consists of a profound nationalist feeling on the part of the overwhelming majority of the Arab people. They are tired of being dominated by out-



"I'm trying to be even-handed."

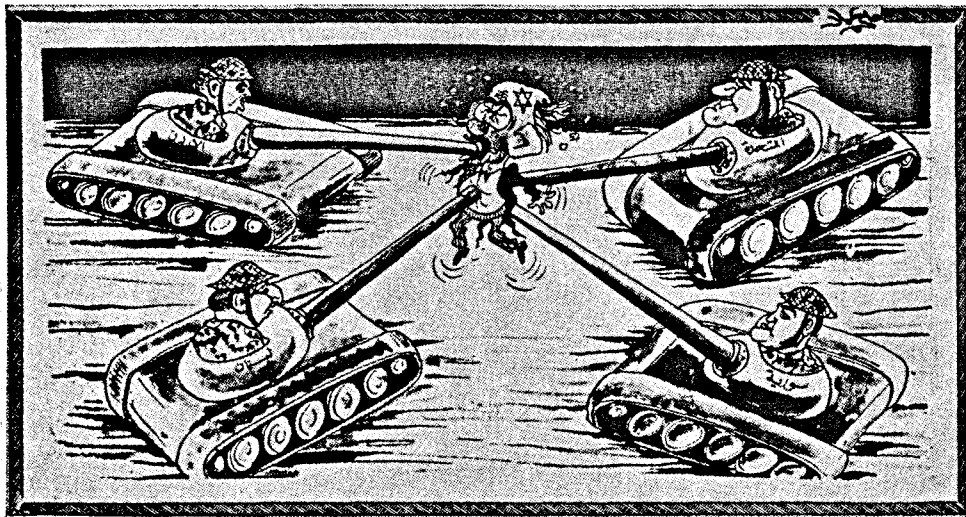


**Sadat and Podgorny: the Soviets move in deeper.**

side powers. But is it a revolutionary response to that sentiment to pursue a policy against Israel which has led to the increasing domination of the Arab world by the major imperialist power in the Middle East today? I speak of course of the Soviet Union. Is it anti-imperialist to replace the Turks and the British with the Russians? Those who want a revolution in the Arab world should learn a lesson from Czechoslovakia that it is not conducive to national independence and self-determination to become a satellite of the Soviet Union.

The Arab revolution is being subverted and perverted by the obsession with Israel. The nationalist mood is legitimate, but it is being exploited by demagogues and pseudo-socialist

army commanders who inflame nationalist hostilities only to maintain power. What has been true of every totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian regime in history is true in the Arab world, today—the discontents of the people are being turned against a foreign enemy. The problem of poverty is forgotten in the call to battle for a holy war against the Jews. Israel is a classical target. It is a menacing target. It constitutes a revolutionary threat to the Arab regimes, not by anything it does but what it is, by the example it sets. It is an example of democracy in a sea of dictatorial regimes. It is an example of economic development and advanced social welfare institutions in the midst of oppressive poverty. In 1925 the Pales-



### When Genocide

tine Arab Congress passed a resolution which said, "The Jewish colonies are typical examples of communistic villages . . . we find that the infectious disease is penetrating day by day into the Arab peasantry." Thirty years later Nasser charged the Zionists with "encouraging the spread of Communism." And only a few months ago Saudi Arabia's King Faisal charged that "Zionism and Communism are working hand in glove . . . It's all part of a great plot, a grand conspiracy." The thoughts might be confused but the meaning is clear—the example of Israel is a threat to the *status quo* in the Arab world.

#### Genocidal Threats

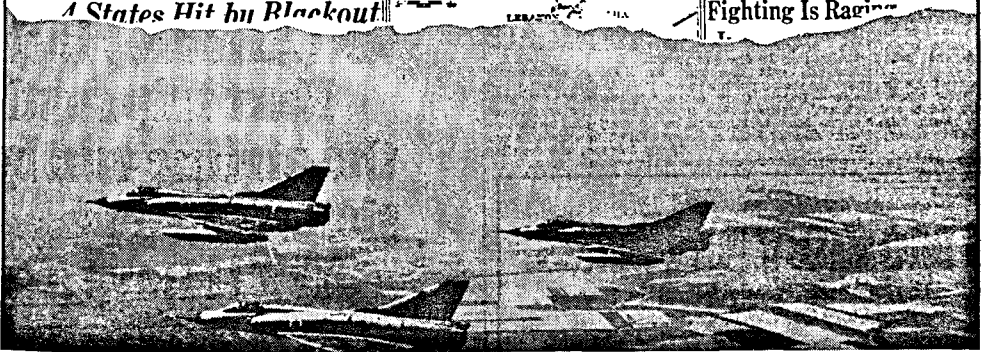
For this and other crimes, it is decreed that Israel must be destroyed. The argument of Israel's "left" opponents rests heavily on the contention that the Arab threats to destroy Israel are not genuine. So far these threats remain untested because of Israel's ability to defend itself, but I think it is shocking that anyone can expect a

people that has suffered genocide to dismiss genocidal threats as empty. It becomes even more shocking when we bear in mind that the Arab threats are not simply isolated remarks, but are made in the context of a massive anti-Semitic propaganda campaign conducted by the Arab governments. These governments publish "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the famous anti-Semitic tract about an imaginary plot of Jewry to seize world power, a plot which can be frustrated, it is said, only by exterminating the conspirators. The Protocols were used to inspire pogroms in Czarist Russia, and they were also used by Hitler to justify his "final solution to the Jewish problem." They continue to be published today by the Arab governments and their contents are quoted on radio broadcasts and in school textbooks. After the Egyptian Ministry of Orientation published the Protocols, for example, Nasser's brother reissued them. Other governments do the same. It is not insignificant that the only

# ISRAELI AND ARAB FORCES BATTLING; BOTH CLAIM LAND AND AIR VICTORIES; CEASE-FIRE EFFORTS STALLED IN U.N.

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seemed imminent.

other government which brought out an official edition of the Protocols and which published similar anti-Semitic material was the Third Reich.

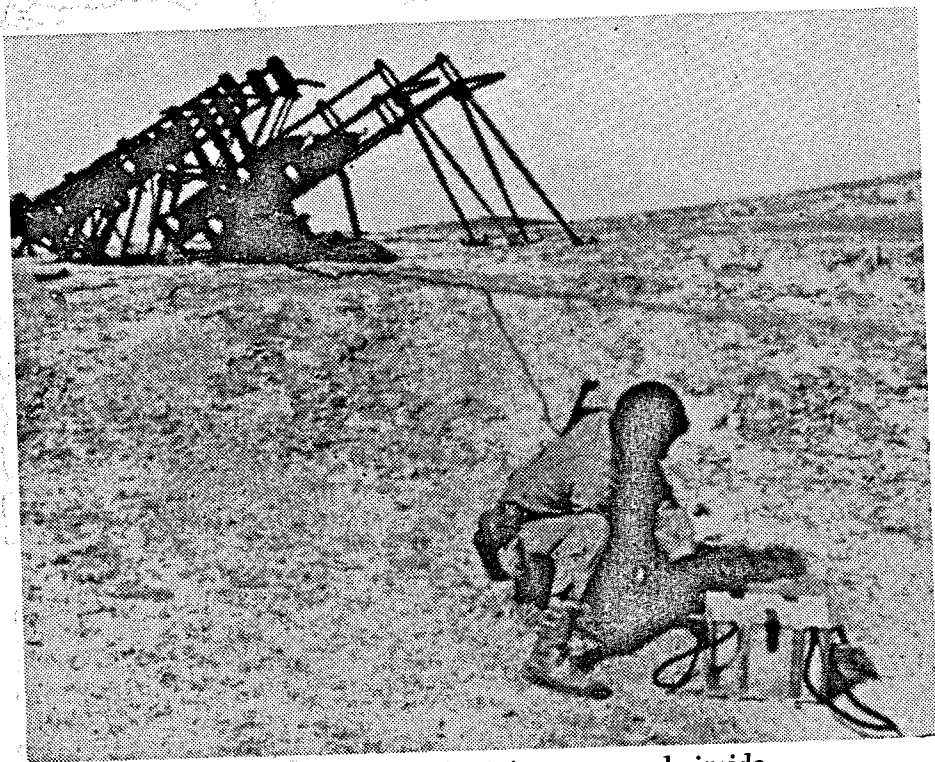
One could go on and paint to countless other examples of official and semi-official Arab anti-Semitism, but my point is not to vilify the Arabs since it is my profound hope that some day Arab and Jew will live in peace. But we must keep in mind this horrible reality of hatred of Jews when we hear stories about "empty" threats to destroy Israel.

## The Fedayeen

This applies also to the fedayeen. By now many people are familiar with Article 6 of the Palestinian National Covenant in which the ten major guerrilla groups which are members of the Palestine Liberation Organization vow to eliminate from what is now Israel all Jews who were not there in 1917. The terrorists have been very embarrassed by the publicity given to the Covenant. Proposing politicide and, if necessary, genocide is not usu-

ally the best way to go about winning humanitarian support around the world. So they coined the slogan of "the democratic secular Palestinian state" and, with the help of Trotskyites, Guevarists, Maoists or what have you, they publicize it at college forums and similar gatherings.

Shafiq al-Hat of the P.L.O. admitted in March, 1970 that "the slogan of a democratic state is intended only to counter the argument that we aspire to throw the Jews into the sea." It is a totally cynical slogan. At the Sixth Palestinian National Congress held a little over a year ago, 92 out of the 100 voting delegates from the terrorist organizations regarded the slogan as either tactical and, therefore, intended only for propagandistic purposes, or as simply a bad slogan that should be discarded altogether. Moreover, the Palestinian National Covenant has yet to be amended, and were it to be amended in the future, one could only believe that it was done to counter bad publicity and interna-



**Border war: Palestinian commando inside Jordan launches rockets against Israel**

tional embarrassment.

The slogan also says that the fedayeen want to create a secular state. Now I am sure that there are some guerrillas, particularly non-Moslems like Habash, who do not want a religious state. But the largest group, the Al Fatah, has continually declared that it is waging a *ji*had (holy war) and it collects monetary contributions in the form of *zaka*t (religious obligations). Thus, they are waging a religious war to establish a secular state.

The great irony is that there already is a democratic, secular state in Palestine, and that state is Israel. It is democratic in that there is free expression of all political points of view,

even those hostile to the existence of the state. Indeed, Israel is the only genuinely democratic state in the Middle East.

Israel is a secular state in addition to being democratic. It does not cease being a secular state because it is a nation state, a predominantly Jewish nation state. If Israel is to be judged a non-secular state because of this, then all nation states must be judged similarly. The predominant nationality in Israel is Jewish, but Judaism is not the state religion, a sharp contrast to all of the Arab states, except Lebanon, where Islam is the state religion. The only area of Israeli law that is non-secular has to do with personal mat-

ters such as marriage and divorce. I am critical of this, as are many Israelis who are trying to change it. But this is a minor issue which is blown out of proportion by the enemies of Israel who should save their wrath for the Arab states where the violations of secularity are far greater.

The solution to the Palestinian problem should not and cannot involve any infringement of Israel's sovereignty. Needless to say, however, this does not exclude the creation of an autonomous Palestinian state or entity on the West Bank and in the Gaza. But no Arab government has supported this idea, and the Al Fatah has stated that any Palestinian who sup-



ports it "will be brought before a revolutionary court." Yasir Arafat has already given us an idea of the kind of verdict that will be reached by such a "revolutionary" juridical procedure. "Tell the West Bank inhabitants," he said, "that if anyone raises his voice calling for the establishment of a feeble state, we will cut off his head."

Arab extremists, it should be pointed out in this context, have al-

ways slaughtered moderates who believed in peaceful coexistence with the Jews. Today some of the extremists use fashionable left-wing rhetoric, while in the past they were identified with the Mufti on the right. The content of what they say, though, remains the same: Israel must be annihilated.

### Moral Issue

The distinguished Protestant theologian A. Roy Eckhardt and his wife recently published a book, ENCOUNTER WITH ISRAEL: A CHALLENGE TO CONSCIENCE, in which they made the following acute observation: "Israel has the same right to life that any country has. But Israel is not God . . . To be pro-Israel, in the sense of acknowledging and praising Israel's integrity and freedom, one does not have to be anti-somebody



Associated Press

Victim: A wounded Israeli boy

else or blind to Israel's problems and faults . . . There is no such thing as a partial right to exist . . . Thus we are brought back to the issue of moral neutrality. If party A intends to destroy party B, the option of neutrality is closed to party C. He either consents to the intended destruction or he opposes it . . . this need not mean that he is opposing the welfare of party A. Genuine concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of Arabs requires that we do whatever we can to turn them away from politicide."

On a certain level the issues in the Middle East conflict are simpler than in other conflicts. In the end one either consents to politicide or one does not. The position of one who does not consent can be buttressed by the knowledge that he is supporting the existence of what is probably the closest approximation to a democratic socialist society in the world, but the nature of Israeli society is not the basic issue. It is no doubt unfortunate that there are some people who call themselves radicals who don't appreciate Israeli society, especially its democratic institutions. But there is no moral or political justification for using this or any view about Israel as a basis for arguing that it should not exist. The principle at stake here—a nation's right to exist—applies to every country. Which is also to say that there is no exception to the rule: it applies as much to Israel as to any

other nation.

Israel's secure existence is the basic issue in the Middle East conflict. This has been so since the establishment of the state. There are other issues in the conflict that lend themselves to compromise, but not this one. A nation cannot compromise on its own right to exist. To do so would be suicidal.

It is possible that some of those who deny Israel's right to exist have not thought clearly about the consequences of its destruction. If so, they should think again, for these consequences would be genocidal. The aim of our struggle, writes the Al Fatah, "is not to impose our will on the enemy but to destroy him in order to take his place." The Arab-Israeli conflict, they write, is not a conventional war where the purpose is to defeat the enemy. It is a "people's war" in which the purpose is "to extirpate him," to remove the "existential traces" of Israeli society. One can't hedge over the meaning of these statements or make them less abhorrent by pointing to the extenuating circumstances which provoked them. One either supports or opposes them. To support or even to excuse them is to invite a bloodbath in the Middle East. To oppose them, *unconditionally*, is not only the humane and sane thing to do, but it is also the only way that peace will ever be brought to the Middle East.

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